

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND  
SUPREME COURT

JESSICA MARIE PURCELL, )  
 )  
 Petitioner, )  
 )  
 v. ) SU-2023-  
 )  
 CLAY JOHNSON, TOWN COUNCIL OF )  
 TOWN OF RICHMOND, and CHARIHO )  
 REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE, )  
 )  
 Respondents. )

**PETITION IN EQUITY AND MEMORANDUM OF LAW  
FOR WRIT OF *QUO WARRANTO***

By this Petition, Jessica Marie Purcell (“Purcell”) seeks a judgment removing respondent Clay Johnson (“Johnson”) from the Chariho Regional School Committee (the “School Committee”) and ordering the Town Council of the Town of Richmond (the “Council”) to appoint Purcell to the School Committee as required by the Chariho Act and the Richmond Home Rule Charter as grounds for this petition, Purcell states as follows:

1. Exclusive original jurisdiction over this matter is vested in this Court pursuant to R.I.G.L. §10-14-1. *See also Felkner v. Chariho Regional School Ctte.*, 968 A.2d 865, 869 (R.I. 2009).
2. Purcell and Johnson are residents of Richmond, Rhode Island.

3. The School Committee is the operating authority of the Chariho Regional School District, which encompasses the towns of Charlestown, Richmond and Hopkinton. The jurisdiction of the School Committee is governed by the Chariho Act, Pub. Law 1958, ch. 55, as amended by Pub. Law 1986, ch. 286.

4. The method of selecting Richmond's representatives to the School Committee is governed by the Chariho Act and by Richmond's Home Rule Charter (the "Charter"), which was ratified by the General Assembly in 2009, *see* Pub. Law 2009, ch. 12.

5. In the general election on November 8, 2022, Richmond voters elected two residents to fill vacant seats on the School Committee. The two winners of the election received 1549 votes and 1496 votes respectively. Purcell was the third-place candidate with 1469 votes and was therefore the unelected candidate with the highest number of votes in the election. A true copy of the certified election results is attached hereto as Exhibit A.

6. On or about January 5, 2023, an elected member of the School Committee from Richmond, Gary Ligouri ("Ligouri"), submitted his resignation to the Town Council.

7. Section 10(1)(c) of the Chariho Act, adopted in 1958, provides that any vacancy arising from the resignation of a School Committee member shall be filled

by a majority vote of the town council of the town represented by the resigning member.

8. The Charter, ratified by the General Assembly in 2009, adds the additional requirement that the Town Council fill any such vacancy by appointing the unelected candidate for School Committee with the highest number of votes in the last election.

9. In violation of the requirements in the Charter, the Town Council voted on January 17, 2023 to appoint Johnson to serve the remainder of Ligouri's term on the School Committee. A true copy of Johnson's Certificate of Appointment is attached hereto as Exhibit B.

10. The Chariho Act and the Charter do not conflict. Whenever possible, statutes should be interpreted so that they are consistent rather than conflicting. *See, e.g., Kells v. Town of Lincoln*, 874 A.2d 204, 212 (R.I. 2005). The Chariho Act and the Charter, read together, require the Town Council to appoint Purcell to serve the remainder of Ligouri's term on the School Committee.

11. In the alternative, even if the Chariho Act and the Charter could not be read consistently, the Charter would control because it was adopted by the voters of Richmond in 2008 and ratified by the General Assembly in 2009, while the Chariho Act dates back 65 years to 1958. *See, e.g., Berthiaume v. School Cttee. of*

*City of Woonsocket*, 397 A.2d 889, 893 (R.I. 1979) (holding that if two statutes are in irreconcilable conflict, the last-enacted statute will be preferred).

12. In addition to the rules of statutory construction cited in the preceding paragraphs, the Charter also takes precedence over the Chariho Act because the general requirement of the Chariho Act (that the Town Council appoint a replacement) should not be read to undermine the more specific requirement of the Charter (that the Town Council appoint the unelected candidate with the highest number of votes). *See Felkner v. Chariho Regional School Ctte.*, 968 A.2d 865, 870 (R.I. 2009) (holding that “When confronted with competing statutory provisions that cannot be harmonized, . . . this Court will defer to the more precise language governing a particular subject.”).

13. The Town Council’s selection of Johnson to fill the vacancy on the School Committee contravenes the plain language of the Charter.

WHEREFORE, Purcell respectfully requests that this Court:

1. Set an expedited briefing schedule in this matter;
2. Decree that Johnson is not a member of the School Committee and that Purcell is the rightful holder of the seat vacated by Ligouri;
3. Order the Town Council to comply with the Charter and appoint Purcell to fill the remainder of Ligouri’s term on the School Committee;
4. Award Purcell her costs and attorney’s fees; and

5. Award Purcell such other and further relief as the Court finds just and equitable.

Respectfully submitted ,

JESSICA MARIE PURCELL,

By her attorney

/s/ Jeffrey L. Levy  
Jeffrey L. Levy (#9233)  
LEVY & BLACKMAN LLP  
469 Angell Street, Suite 2  
Providence, RI 02906  
Phone: (401)437-6900  
Fax: (401)632-4695  
jlevy@levyblackman.com

**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I hereby certify that on this 23d day of January 2023, I caused the above Petition in Equity to be served by hand delivery upon Clay Johnson, 184 Richmond Townhouse Road, Richmond, Rhode Island, and by email and first class mail upon counsel for the other respondents as follows:

Karen R. Ellsworth, Esq.  
Richmond Town Solicitor  
180 Matunuck School House Road  
Wakefield, RI 02879  
kellsworth6@verizon.net

Jon Anderson, Esq.  
Counsel to the Chariho Regional School Committee  
Brennan, Recupero, Cascione, Scungio & McAllister, LLP  
362 Broadway  
Providence, RI 02909  
janderson@brasm.com

/s/ Jeffrey L. Levy

**EXHIBIT A**

TOWN OF RICHMOND, RHODE ISLAND  
5 Richmond Townhouse Road  
Wyoming, RI 02898  
(401) 539-9000 [www.richmondri.com](http://www.richmondri.com)



**Board of Canvassers**

November 29, 2022

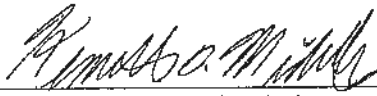
On November 8th, 2022, the Town of Richmond held its annual Election. The offices elected were Town Council and School Committee. In addition, there were eleven local questions. Below are the certified results from said Election:

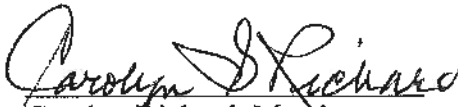
**Chariho School Committee Richmond -Four Year Term- Vote for 2**

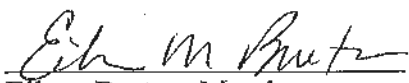
Candidate	Total votes	Pct
REP Patricia A. Pouliot (REP)	1549	24.0%
REP Kathryn E. Colasante (REP)	1496	23.1%
DEM Jessica Marie Purcell (DEM)	1469	22.7%
Ind Ryan P. Callahan (Ind)	1033	16.0%
Ind William G. Day (Ind)	904	14.0%
Write-in	12	0.2%

We, the undersigned, Members of the Richmond Canvassing Authority, do hereby certify that the results are a true and accurate account of the Town Election conducted in Richmond on Tuesday, November 8th, 2022, and that all counts were zero (0) when the polls opened, and that the Election was held in accordance with laws of the State of Rhode Island and the Town Charter.


**Richmond Board of Canvassers and Registration**

  
Kenneth Michaud, Chair.

  
Carolyn Richard, Member

  
Eileen Burton, Member

Attest:

  
Erin F. Liese, CMC  
Town Clerk

**EXHIBIT B**



TOWN OF RICHMOND



CERTIFICATE OF APPOINTMENT

Washington sc:

To Clay Johnson

GREETING:

This certifies that at a meeting of the TOWN COUNCIL of said RICHMOND, held on the 19th day of January A.D., 2023 you were appointed to the Chariho School Committee

of said town and are, by virtue of said appointment, authorized and empowered after having been duly engaged according to law, to discharge all the duties of said office and to exercise all the powers thereto belonging according to law.



GIVEN UNDER MY HAND AND THE SEAL OF THE TOWN OF RICHMOND, RHODE ISLAND

THIS 19th DAY OF January 2023

E. F. Liese  
Town Clerk

Term Expires: 11/2024

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

WASHINGTON COUNTY, Sc.

In the Town of Richmond January 20 A.D., 2023

Then the above named Clay Johnson

personally appeared before me and solemnly swore to be true and faithful unto this State and support the Laws and Constitution thereof and the Constitution of the United States, and he/she would well and truly execute the duties of the above-named office for the ensuing term years or until another be engaged in his/her room, or until he/she be legally discharged therefrom.

Elaine J. Morgan  
Notary Public  
State of Rhode Island  
MY COMMISSION EXPIRES ~~4/5/2021~~  
1/6/2025

Elaine J. Morgan  
Notary Public